Canadian Institutes of Health Research | Instituts de recherche en santé du Canada | Canada

The Brain Brief - Vol. 2, No 2

July 2005

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Message from the Scientific Director

Dr. Remi Quirion, Ph.D, FRSC, CQ
Scientific Director

Recent discussions with some of my scientific colleagues made me realize that there are a lot of misperceptions about INMHA and CIHR in general. This is why this edition of the Brain Brief is a retrospective of what we have done since the establishment of the Institute and to explain our role in relation to CIHR and the investigator-initiated grant competition. As I mentioned in our last Brain Brief, the operating grant program is very important to INMHA and we will do our best to ensure that it will remain a major priority at CIHR.

The timing is appropriate as we are currently undergoing our first evaluation. CIHR has commissioned EKOS Research Associates Inc. to conduct the evaluation of each of the 13 Institutes. As part of this evaluation, EKOS or one of the associate firms are conducting interviews with a series of key stakeholders. I thank everyone who has participated or will participate in the review of INMHA. It is a good exercise in terms of taking stock of how our strategic funds have been invested and to evaluate the effectiveness of the Institute. Communications is obviously one area where we need to improve on.
We may have done a better job in explaining CIHR internationally. There has been a lot of interest in the virtual Institute model and I, as well as my staff, have given numerous presentations on CIHR and the Institute. In 2002, I published an article in TRENDS in Neurosciences (Vol. 25, No. 5), "A Canadian experiment: the Institute of Neurosciences, Mental Health and Addiction". Although a little out of date, it provides a good overview of the mandate and objectives of INMHA and the strategic priorities from our first Strategic Plan. Please contact Ramia Jabr at jabram@douglas.mcgill.ca if you are interested in receiving a reprint of the article. When you compare my picture to the one on this page, you will note that I look a little more tired these days. It has been a demanding job but I continue to be energized by the major challenge our Institute represents and the exciting opportunities that lie ahead.

What is in the works now? At the Institute Advisory Board (IAB), we have begun discussing our second

Strategic Plan (2006-2011). Many of you are also aware of the Kirby Commission which should result in recommendations for a national strategy for Canada related to mental health, mental illnesses and addictions, including research. Senator Kirby attended our last IAB meeting in May and we discussed means to work very closely with his Committee. One of the challenges is to establish a 10-year research agenda for this area. We have therefore decided to issue an open call to get input from all our stakeholders ("**Unique Challenges in Mental Health and Addictions**"). Our timeline for this is very short as the Commission must submit its final report by December 2005. The call will be issued on July 15 and the submission deadline is September 30. More information on this is provided on the last page of this newsletter.

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Excellence and Relevance

Scientific excellence is the basis for all research supported by CIHR, investigator-initiated as well as strategic. Investigator-initiated describes the regular operating grant competition of CIHR which is essentially a continuation of one of the key programs offered by the former Medical Research Council of Canada. What is often not realized or appreciated is that about 70 percent of today's CIHR budget is dedicated to investigator-initiated research. The remaining budget goes to research in strategic areas and is primarily distributed through the Institutes. All Institutes have the same strategic budget and the funding available to INMHA is modest relative to its broad mandate and the large scientific community represented by the Institute.

The first task of INMHA in 2001 was to develop a Strategic Plan that would set the direction for the Institute's activities and funding initiatives. It was a major undertaking that included extensive consultation with all of our stakeholders, from the scientists to our various partner organizations. The process defined INMHA's vision, mission, values and strategic goals and priorities. The strategic priorities included general areas of focus: innovation in research, partnerships, knowledge translation, international and governance. Innovation in research was divided into four major areas: 1) training, 2) strategic initiatives, 3) research in emerging areas or where unique opportunities are arising, and 4) research in bioethics. Priorities 2 and 3 were further broken down into several specific research themes which guided the development of INMHA's funding initiatives and partnerships. So in addition to the standard criteria of excellence, research funded by INMHA must also be relevant to the mandate of the Institute and responsive to the specific requirements of Requests for Applications.

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Strategic Priorities and Initiatives

As was the process with our Strategic Plan, we develop each strategic initiative in consultation with stakeholders. This usually begins with a workshop that will result in a set of recommendations for a specific research area and form the basis for a Request for Applications (RFA). INMHA has sponsored and organized many of these workshops in collaboration with partner organizations. A list of these workshops and other events is available on our website.

Institute research initiatives encourage a multi-disciplinary approach and may include one or several funding tools. INMHA takes a flexible approach to supporting research which means that not all RFAs are issued and coordinated by CIHR but can also be led by partner organizations. Many initiatives involve one or more partners, including other federal agencies and provincial funding bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector organizations and international agencies.

During the development of the Strategic Plan, INMHA already participated in the funding of two major initiatives. The first was an Interdisciplinary Health Research Team (IHRT) on Gene Therapy for Neurological Disorders and supported in partnership with three other Institutes and two external partners. The second was a Community Alliance for Health Research (CAHR) grant with the Institute of Aboriginal Peoples Health for a National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research.

Details on all INMHA initiatives and funded projects can be found on the CIHR website. Make sure to check the INMHA Powerpoint presentation (to be posted shortly) for a comprehensive summary.

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INMHA's Four Major Initiatives

- **Regenerative Medicine - Neurosciences**

What initially started out as one of INMHA's four strategic initiatives quickly evolved into one of four CIHR large initiatives - Regenerative Medicine and Nanomedicine (along with Global Health, Clinical Research and the Canadian Lifelong Health Initiative). It marked the first step in creating a national framework for regenerative medicine and nanomedicine in Canada, with an initial focus on the areas of Nanotechnology Development and Nanomedicine, Stem Cells, and Tissue Engineering and most recently Rehabilitation Sciences. Co-led by INMHA and the Institute of Genetics, the initiative involves numerous internal and external partners and several key funding programs. The first RFA was issued in 2003 with an initial funding commitment of $12.3 million. It was re-launched in 2004 and again in June 2005 and it is expected that the commitment established for the first round will be maintained and potentially expanded. Our Team Lead for the Initiative, Eric Marcotte, works hard on developing partnerships and expanding the funding base. The current RFA and list of funded projects can be found on the CIHR website and at www.regenerativemedicine.ca/

- **Nicotine Addiction and Tobacco Abuse**

This is the second major cross-cutting initiative led by INMHA (with the Institute of Cancer Research). Co-ordination is provided by the Canadian Tobacco Control Research Initiative (CTCRI) and also includes numerous CIHR and external partners. The RFA "Advancing the Science to Reduce Nicotine Addiction and Tobacco Abuse was announced in 2003 and is expected to fund at least $5 million over 5 years. The basis for the RFA was framed in the 2002 Canadian Tobacco Control Research Summit. Two other major addictions workshops were held in 2003, one on alcohol and illicit drugs and another on problem gambling. The partners in these two major events agreed to come together for a new RFA entitled "Research in Addictions: Innovative Approaches in Health Research" which includes a theme on co-occurring addictions or cross-addictions. The RFA and the list of funded projects from the initial RFA can be found on the CTCRI website and at www.ctcri.ca/

- **First Episode in Neurological and Mental Illnesses and in Addiction**

"Neurodevelopment and Early Life Events" was one of the themes in our first New Emerging Team (NET) Grant competition launched in 2001 and four grants were funded. In 2004, INMHA organized a workshop in this area and in December 2004 announced an RFA on "Early Life Events and First Episodes of Brain Disorders", a partnership with the Institute of Human Development, Child and Youth Health. It offers NET Grants and High Risk Seed Grants for one of the five eligible research areas - Stigma and Discrimination.

- **Co-occurrence of Brain Disorders with Other Health Problems, and Co-morbidity**

This was one of the themes included in our second NET grant competition in 2002. A major RFA is now planned for 2006, with input from a planning workshop to take place in Ottawa on September 22-23, 2005 and an RFA is planned for 2006. For further information on this initiative and the workshop please contact Barb Beckett at 613-948-4877, bbeckett@cihr-irsc.gc.ca.

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Research in Emerging Areas and Unique Opportunities

To support Institute specific themes under this broad category, we used the New Emerging Team (NET) grant program. The grants are for teams of three to six independent investigators working on a collaborative multi-disciplinary research project. Funding is provided for five years at up to $300,000 per year. The first NET competition in 2001 included the four themes listed in our Strategic Plan:

1) Stigma and Discrimination
2) Understanding the Placebo Effect
3) Neurodevelopment and Early Life Events

4) Computational Neurosciences

The first two were re-launched in 2002, together with two of INMHA's major research themes: 1) Regenerative Medicine - Neurosciences and 2) Co-morbidity and Co-occurrence of Brain Disorders and a fifth theme: Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. In 2003, we covered two new research themes both of which were re-launched in 2004:

1) Neuroethics
2) Suicide Prevention Targeted to Aboriginal People (in partnership with the Institute of Aboriginal Peoples' Health)

A total of 13 NET grants are supported by INMHA within the aforementioned themes. The most recent theme announced in June 2005 is "Mental Health in the Workplace", in partnership with the Institute of Public and Population Health, the Institute of Gender and Health and a number of external partners.

A number of emerging research themes were also supported through special initiatives with other institutes or external partners, for example:

- Stigma and Global Health (with NIH/Fogarty International Center - 1 grant funded by INMHA)
- Violence, Gender and Health across the Lifespan (co-funding of 2 NET grants with Institute of Gender and Health)
- Analysis of the Canadian Community Health Survey on Mental Health and Well-being (17 grants supported in partnership with a number of CIHR partners, Statistics Canada and the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre)

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Training

Training of future generation of researchers and developing capacity in all areas of neurosciences, mental health and addiction is extremely important to INMHA. Over 30 percent of our strategic budget is committed to training. One of the key programs that INMHA has participated in to achieve this goal is the **CIHR Strategic Training Initiative in Health Research (STIHR)**. Grants are provided for six years at up to $300,000 per year. INMHA is currently funding or participating in the funding of a total of 18 teams. Several funding partnerships have been established with external organizations through this program. A workshop is planned for November with the team leaders of all of the INMHA supported (STIHRs), co-sponsored with our partners (NAAR and FRSQ).

The **Brain Star Program** was established by INMHA early on to recognize outstanding young researchers and quickly became one of our most successful programs. The award, given every two weeks, goes to emerging scientists who have published their findings in prominent scientific journals. Topics span the entire spectrum of INMHA's mandate and amount to an impressive portfolio of published scientific knowledge. Every year, INMHA publishes a booklet showcasing the winners. The program now also includes a Brain Star of the Year award.

Another investment in training is through INMHA **bridging funds**. We have supported 11 CIHR Doctoral Awards, 8 Post-doctoral Fellowships and one Senior Research Fellowship.

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Bridging Funds through Priority Announcements

To demonstrate our commitment to the CIHR investigator-initiated grant program, we are also supporting highly rated proposals related to the INMHA mandate in each of the March and September competitions. 34 grants have been made by INMHA since 2002. The majority of grantees have subsequently been successful in obtaining CIHR or external grants.

INMHA has also provided bridging funds for a number of Salary Awards, including New and Senior

Investigators and Clinician Scientists.

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Partnerships and International Initiatives

Partnerships at the national and international level are key to the success of the Institute and the fulfillment of our mandate. We are committed to working with our stakeholder groups in everything we do, from developing strategic priorities to joint funding initiatives. Thanks to the many research areas covered by INMHA, opportunities for collaboration are abundant and we work with a large number and wide array of partners both in Canada and internationally. The efficiency with which we advance our research agenda is enhanced by leveraging the efforts and resources of other organizations who share our mission. Our funding programs encourage our scientists to collaborate and leverage the expertise of their colleagues in other Canadian and international research institutions.

Very early on we organized two NGO Roundtables to assist us in the development of our Strategic Plan. These meetings also set the stage for how we approach partnerships and relate to other organizations.

All of our partners are also invited to our **Annual Meetings**, bringing them together with our scientific stakeholders - trainees, Brain Star recipients and scientists from all four CIHR pillars. Each year these meetings focus on three major research themes and also include NGO sessions where we discuss collaboration and seek input from our partners.

Partnership goes beyond money but joint support for research is one of the key outcomes of our collaborations. The following is a list of some of the funding programs established to date:

- Barbara Turnbull Award for Spinal Cord Research (with Barbara Turnbull Foundation for Spinal Cord Research and NeuroScience Canada)
- Michael Smith Chair in Neurosciences & Mental Health (with EJLB Foundation and Royal Society of Canada)
- Vascular Health and Dementia Research Grants Program (led by Heart & Stroke Foundation and with Alzheimer Society of Canada, Pfizer Canada Inc. and the CIHR Rx&D Research Program.
- Co-funding of INMHA Young Investigator Award (with Schizophrenia Society of Canada)
- Neurobiology of Psychiatric Disorders and Addictions Program (led by Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation and with AstraZeneca and the CIHR Rx&D Research Program).
- Co-funding of NET Program in Regenerative Medicine - Neuroscience (with Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation)
- Co-funding of Strategic Training Program Grants (with FRSQ and international partner - see below)
- Physician Health in Canada (with Canadian Medical Association and CMA Centre for Physician Health and Well-Being)
- Eric Single Addiction Studentship Award (led by Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre and with Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse)
- Neuroscience Canada Brain Repair Program (led by Neuroscience Canada)
- Interdisciplinary Health Research Team (IHRT) on Gene Therapy for Neurological Disorders (with Muscular Dystrophy Association of Canada and Neuroscience Canada Partnership)
- Schizophrenia Research Chair (with AstraZeneca Canada, the Royal University Hospital Foundation - University of Saskatchewan and the Schizophrenia Research Foundation)

International Partnerships are equally important to INMHA and efforts in this area are extensive. We have developed close links with non-governmental funding bodies, international organizations and other federal funding agencies such as the US National Institutes of Health (NIH). Some of the joint funding initiatives to date are listed below:

- Japan-Canada Joint Health Research Program (annual competition with Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. CIHR partnership led by INMHA
- Brain Disorders in Developing World (RFA with NIH, led by Fogarty International Center, re-launched as Program Announcement in 2005
- Canada-Finland-China Collaborative Program in Neuroscience (led by Academy of Finland)
- RFA on Genetics of Autism (major international public-private partnership led by NIH-National Institute of

Mental Health)
- Program Announcement on Shared Neurobiology of Fragile X Syndrome and Autism (international public-private partnership led by NIH-National Institute of Mental Health)
- Joint NIH-CIHR Conference on the Biology of Manual Therapies (led by National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, June 2005)
- Stigma and Global Health (RFA with NIH, led by Fogarty International Center, to be re-launched in 2005)
- INMHA-IBRO Schools in Neuroscience (with International Brain Research Organization)
- NARSAD Young Investigator Awards (with National Alliance of Research on Schizophrenia and Depression)
- Co-funding of Strategic Training Program Grants (with National Alliance for Autism Research)

An agreement has also been signed with Mexico (Institutes of Neurology and Psychiatry). We are also collaborating with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and are currently working with the Institute of Gender and Health on the possible establishment of a WHO Centre in Gender and Mental Health. Other organizations we are interacting with regularly are the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) and the Dana Foundation. INMHA exhibits at the SfN Annual Meetings, as well as at other international meetings. One new international collaboration currently under discussion is with the National Natural Science Foundation of China. INMHA initiated the discussions and it is now being negotiated as a CIHR-wide initiative to be modeled after the Japan-Canada Joint Health Research Program.

To learn more about our philosophy and some of our partnership activities nationally and internationally, please see our December 2003 Brain Brief: "Views from the Inside: Partnerships at INMHA".

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Initiatives aimed at Knowledge Translation

Knowledge Translation Grants

As part of our commitment to Knowledge Translation we have funded 5 KT grants in partnership with CIHR Knowledge Translation Branch and other Institutes.

Brain Awareness Week

This terrific international effort is organized annually by the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives and we have supported a number of activities.

Mindscapes

Participating in the organization of Mindscapes was one of INMHA's most unique endeavors. The exhibition of art works by persons affected by mental illness was presented at the National Gallery of Canada in May 2004. The efforts were led by the Canadian Mental Health Association in collaboration with the art workshop Les Impatients and many sponsors.

The Brain from Top to Bottom

Another INMHA supported initiative is this website encyclopedia to popularize scientific information about the brain and human behaviors and aimed at various audiences. The site (www.thebrain.mcgill.ca/) is a work in progress but has already received international recognition for its uniqueness, easy to use and up-to-date information.

CIHR Outreach Initiative

This unique initiative was developed by INMHA to enlist NGOs in partnership to help bridge the communications gap between science and the general public. The program offers wards of up to $10,000 for innovative promotional ideas that take a given message to the public or targeted organizations. The first competition co-sponsored with the Institute of Gender and Health and CIHR Communications Branch and four

winners were announced in 2003. We recently held a second competition with CIHR Communications Branch and this year's winners are:
- The Centre for Neuroscience Studies at Queen's University for Brain Awareness Week and Neuroscience Outreach Program
- The Canadian Coalition for Senior's Mental Health for a project on Senior's Mental Health Research Network
- The Autism Society of Ontario: Toonie for Autism Day Campaign: A Look at Research on Autism in Canada.

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Unique Challenges in Mental Health and Addictions - we need your input!!

Among the recommendations presented in the interim report of the Kirby Commission on Mental Illness, Mental Health and Addiction (published in December 2004) is a call for increased funding for research in mental health in Canada (www.senate-senat.ca/SOCIAL.asp). INMHA has worked closely with Senator Kirby and his Committee and we have been challenged to come up with a 10-year research agenda for mental health and addiction for inclusion in the Commission's final report to be submitted by the end of this year. While the timeline is extremely short, we feel it is essential that we have input from all of our stakeholders for this important task. To achieve this, we have decided to issue an open call for submissions by September 30. Input is requested in the form of a 5-page document describing what you see as the single biggest challenge for mental health and/or addictions research is in Canada over the coming decade. The call will include some examples but we need your wisdom and imagination. Please consult the CIHR website for detailed information on the call and requirements for submission.

The outcome of this consultation process will also feed into the development of our second Strategic Plan. If successful, we plan to issue similar calls for other areas covered by INMHA's mandate such as neurosciences, vision, hearing, etc. Stakeholder input will also be important for the action plan to be developed by the new Public Health Agency of Canada. We must ensure that the unique challenges facing research in mental health and addictions are included in all aspects of the health agenda in Canada.

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Other News

IAB - Comings and Goings

The INMHA Institute Advisory Board brings together scientists and representatives from the voluntary sector, each of them bringing their own unique expertise and experience. The IAB is integral to the success of the Institute and members become part of the extended INMHA family. So it is always sad when the time comes to renew the membership and we have to say good-bye to some of them. Mike Salter, Roberta Palmour, Lisa McKerracher and Phil Upshall have all been part of the inaugural Board and are completing their terms this year. We owe them a world of gratitude and hope they will stay part of the family and continue to be outspoken advocates for INMHA.

As sad as we are to see these friends leave, we are pleased to welcome four new members who will most certainly contribute in their own unique ways: Judy Hills from the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation, Freda Miller at Sick Kids Hospital/University of Toronto, Yves deKoninck at Laval University, and Serge Brochu at the University of Montreal. Their biographies will soon be made available on the INMHA website at. We extend a warm welcome to all of our new members and we look forward to working together!

Request for News Items

Please let us know of any upcoming news-worthy research publications or other news, including external funding opportunities or special initiatives that may be of interest to our readers. Information should be forwarded to Astrid Eberhart at aeberhart@cihr-irsc.gc.ca.